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ABSTRACT

Trust, respect, and caring are crucial components in achieving or maintaining school effectiveness. This paper presents findings of a case study that examined the ways in which one urban school manifested particular characteristics of community--those of respect, caring, and trust. The one-year case study at an elementary school in Los Angeles (California) gathered data through participant observation, interviews, and document analysis. The study found that school improvement is contingent upon changing school cultures and patterns of relating, rather than making only structural changes. Teachers and administrators in the school worked together to reach their goals of helping students become educated thinkers and caring members of society. School personnel also interacted with parents and students in ways that manifested caring, trust, and respect, resulting in home-school collaboration. (Contains 42 references.) (LMI)

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A Community of Respect, Caring and Trust:

One School's Story

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World Impact, Inc./UCLA

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> The structural elements of "restructuring" have received excessive emphasis in many reform proposals, while the need to improve the culture, climate, and interpersonal relationships in schools has received too little attention. While it may be easier for policymakers to imagine how to restructure schools rather than change their culture, the latter also appears to be a key to successful reform. (Louis, Marks & Kruse, 1996, p. 786)

> *To restructure is not to reculture*. (Fullan, 1993, p. 49)

> Schools with a high incidence of staff problems are equalizing in the distribution of academic achievement--everyone tends to do poorly in such schools. (Bryk, Lee & Holland, 1993, p. 269)

The nature of relationships between and among school faculty and staff members has received a great deal of attention in recent years (e.g., Flinders, 1988; Johnson, 1990; Little & McLaughlin, 1993; Louis et al., 1996; McLaughlin, Talbert & Bascia, 1990; Rosenholtz, 1989). Not only are researchers attempting to understand factors affecting teacher morale, but they are also trying to understand the link between teachers' workplace environments (including relationships with colleagues) and student achievement. Specifically, the concepts of respect, caring and trust have become commonplace in discussions surrounding school culture (e.g., Barth, 1990; Bryk et al., 1993; Lee, Dedrick & Smith, 1991; Starratt, 1991). In a recent work, I linked the concepts of trust, respect and caring to a broader framework of community, which, I argue, is particularly critical in helping urban schools to become effective or maintain their effectiveness (Kratzer, 1996).

The plight of students who must attend urban schools is often bemoaned in both educational

circles and the popular press (Comer, 1988; Edmonds, 1979; Fine, 1991; Kozol, 1991; Kozol, 1995). Urban schools which serve low-income students of color frequently rank at or near the bottom of their districts and states in various measures of student performance (Haycock & Navarro, 1988; Quality Education for Minorities Project, 1990; Students' performance..., 1996; Valencia, 1991). There is no shortage of theories, empirical studies, or blaming in dealing with urban education.

Recently, a line of conceptual and empirical research has begun to investigate the notion of schools as "communities," arguing that we adopted the wrong metaphor when we began to view schools as organizations *(Gesellschaft)* rather than communities *(Gemeinschaft)* (Sergiovanni, 1994b). Research from a variety of disciplinary perspectives presents the argument that the best schools are places where a strong sense of community or "family" exists (Kratzer, 1996). In particular, successful urban schools are often described in terms of "community," and "family," not just in terms of their academic accomplishments (Sergiovanni, 1994a; Willis, 1995). This paper examines the ways in which one urban school manifested particular characteristics of community which centered around respect, caring and trust.

The Study

To examine how one urban public elementary school exhibited characteristics of a caring community, grasp the complexities of relationships between and among various members of the school community, and gain a variety of perspectives on the school's ethos, mission and goals, I conducted a single-site case study (Yin, 1989) over a period of one school year. The school studied was characterized by a positive climate and sense of community, effective site-based management, teacher collaboration and collegiality, significant parent involvement and enthusiasm, and student-centered curricular and instructional approaches. Case study methodology enabled me to examine what it meant to insiders and onlookers for a school to exhibit community, the process of cultivating a

caring community, and the larger context in which this process took place, including the historical background of the school and the restructuring in which it was engaged.

The selected school was chosen based on recommendations from personnel working with urban schools undergoing reform. Achievement criteria were used partly as the basis for selecting the school, because of my interest in the relationship between effectiveness and community. While standardized test scores at the school were not stellar at the time of the study,[1] they were higher than other local public schools serving similar populations. Furthermore, the school had gained a reputation for instructional and curricular innovation and for success in implementing site-based management principles, and it had been cited by an independent evaluator as one of three schools undergoing restructuring in Los Angeles which were doing particularly well (McKinsey & Co., 1994).

Almost 250 hours of participant observation of classrooms, schoolwide activities, faculty meetings, governance council meetings, and parent meetings, along with semi-structured (audiotaped) interviews with students, parents, teachers and administrators regarding their perceptions of the school climate, culture, and ethos, were the primary means of data collection. Teacher interviewees were chosen according to a stratified random sample by grade level and track. In addition, school and classroom documents were collected to provide historical and social context. These data coupled with field notes were analyzed using a modification of the constant comparative method of analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

The Site

Jackson Elementary School[2] is located 16 miles from downtown Los Angeles and is part of

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[1]The school has seen dramatic improvement in standardized test scores and other measures of student performance in the past two years and was recently honored by the district for its achievements.

[2]This is a pseudonym, as are all proper names associated with this specific site. Other details, however, such as the location of Jackson School in urban Los Angeles and its participation in a city-wide school reform effort sponsored by the Los Angeles Educational Alliance for Restructuring Now (LEARN) are factual.

the second-largest school district in the nation, the Los Angeles Unified School District. Adjacent to industrial and commercial areas, the school serves a neighborhood population residing in apartment buildings and tiny single-family homes. Due to the industrial nature of the area, the majority of the residents are blue collar workers or unskilled laborers. Many families are immigrants from Latin America, Southeast Asia, and the Middle East. Families frequently move into and out of the area as jobs and apartment rentals change.

In spite of fairly high levels of transiency, the racial and ethnic composition of the school has changed only slightly in the past decade. The percentage of Hispanic students has increased steadily and stood at 92.6 percent in the fall of 1995. In contrast, the percentage of white students decreased from 11 percent to 3 percent during the same time period. The African-American and Filipino student populations remained fairly constant at about 2 percent each. From 1991 to 1996, enrollment at Jackson increased from 797 to 1170 students, 90 percent of whom were eligible for Title 1 services and 76 percent of whom were classified as Limited English Proficient (LEP). Over 95 percent of the students qualified for free or reduced-fee lunches and breakfasts under the Federal Lunch Program, up from 82 percent ten years ago. In 1993, 26.1 percent of the students' families received AFDC, a higher percentage than most other schools in their region of the district.

In 1993, Jackson faculty and staff voted to become part of a new restructuring initiative in Los Angeles, called LEARN, which stands for Los Angeles Educational Alliance for Restructuring Now. Spearheaded by educators, corporate and community leaders, LEARN's restructuring plan called for increased autonomy at the school level, particularly over budget, increased parent involvement in school site governance, integrated social services, and better professional development for teachers. Thirty-four schools in the Los Angeles Unified School District volunteered to be part of LEARN during its first year (1993-94), including Jackson. To become a part of LEARN, 75 percent of each of

four "stakeholder" groups (teachers, administrators, parents, and classified staff members) at a school must agree to the decision. At the time of the study, over 150 Los Angeles schools were part of LEARN.

During the 1995-96 school year, Jackson was staffed by a principal, assistant principal, bilingual/Title 1 coordinator, full-time counselor, two special education teachers, and 40 regular education teachers (four of whom shared contracts), along with a variety of support personnel who provided services one or two days per week. Each of the 39 classes (pre-kindergarten through sixth grade) had a part-time aide, and additional aides provided support on the playground, in the library and computer center, and in the workroom. Twenty-two classes (kindergarten through sixth grade) were bilingual (Spanish and English), while fourteen were English-only. The pre-kindergarten class had two sessions each day--one in English and one in Spanish. Special education instruction was provided in the student's primary language.

Due to overcrowding, the school operated on a year-round schedule, as it had for over 15 years. The 1170 students and 42 teachers were divided into three tracks. Each track attended school for two months and then was off for one month. The tracks were staggered so that only two tracks were at school at any given time. Teachers roved every month between the 26 classrooms. Because this schedule resulted in fewer instructional days for each track, the length of the school day was increased to make up the difference. Due to the year-round schedule, the only extended time when no classes were in session was the week between Christmas and New Year's Day. The school year began in early July and ended in late June.

Relationships at Jackson School

Insiders' Beliefs about Jackson

When I asked teachers what they felt made the school work, be successful, etc., the themes of

community and family surfaced repeatedly. Both in formal (audiotaped) interviews and informal conversations, teachers articulated that it was the way they cared for each other as a family which made a difference. Teachers whose spouses were sick or dying felt sustained by the tangible expressions of care which came from other teachers and administrators. New teachers expressed how much they appreciated the support they received when they first came to the school, and those who had taught elsewhere eloquently articulated how different the environment was from where they had previously been. This comment from a transferred teacher was typical:

> We were pretty fragmented at the other school, 'cause it was the old guard and the newer guard....Here, because it was a much younger staff, we were all kind of much more open to new ideas, and also into accepting new people as well. And I know, they [Jackson staff] just accept people with open arms and it's really a very warm feeling.

The faculty recognized that there was something unique in this environment--people reached out to one another, freely giving of their time, ideas, and resources--and it was almost taken for granted that you would of course do the same if you had the opportunity. The teachers felt the strong "teacher camaraderie" was what made Jackson different from other schools. Its inhabitants were willing to share with each other and work together for the good of the students rather than compete with one another for recognition. This was in contrast to a spirit of competition which existed in a number of schools at which Jackson teachers had previously taught. One teacher described the contrast this way:

> **A former school**: It was a very private staff. A lot of very deep problems on the staff. And they had a feeling of competitiveness. They would rather not share the materials because they wanted their class to outshine everybody else's class, rather than wanting the school to look good in general.
>
> **Jackson**: To have teachers pulling together and trying to help each other and feeling like,

> "Hey, if it benefits the kids, who cares if it's my idea or your idea or if I spent the money for the book or if you spent the money for the book? Let's make sure it gets put to good use...Who cares whose idea it is that ends up on the bulletin board out there? If it looks great and makes the school look good, so what if it doesn't have your name on it?"

Furthermore, there was a recognition that this did not just happen by accident. Veteran teachers attributed this camaraderie to careful hiring choices over the years, which had resulted in bringing together a team of teachers who were able to connect well. One seasoned Jackson teacher commented,

> If we want to maintain the quality of our work as a community 'cause we are a community, then we need to make sure that people are willing to buy into where our vision is, and fit like a puzzle. I don't mean everybody has to be robots or think the same way, by any means, but there has to be a certain amount of meshing most definitely.

Teachers felt that this connection to one another extended to their own children as well. Over half of the teachers were themselves parents, and many had very young children at home. It was important to them that their children were included in the Jackson family, as another teacher expressed: "When I came to California, it was just my son and I, who's now 17. That was 11 years ago. When I came to [Jackson], a lot of the people that are here now were here then. And that was it--it was just my son and I, so they became our family." Another teacher, a single mother, rejoiced that her young daughter had been "adopted" by one of the male teachers, and they frequently did things together outside of school. Furthermore, if a teacher needed to teach on a day her child was out of school, administrators were supportive about the teacher bringing her child to Jackson for the day, spending the day in his parent's classroom or visiting in another room. The school culture promoted a link between job and personal life through this acceptance of teachers' own children.

Teachers were proud of the fact that other teachers enrolled their own children at Jackson. And those teachers whose children did attend the school (80 percent of those with elementary-age children) said they would never have sacrificed their children's education for the sake of convenience. Teachers had their children at Jackson because they trusted their colleagues with their children. But teachers also viewed the children in their class as part of the family and felt that they wanted to care for all their students as if they were their own children. One teacher expressed her belief about helping students, which she felt was characteristic of most teachers at the school:

> I don't have a problem with using where I am to benefit my child, 'cause if I can't do that then what's the point? I don't have a problem with that, and I wouldn't just do it for my own kid. I would do it for anybody's kids that I feel like they need this or they need that. A lot of us are that way about it."

These teachers had embraced what John Dewey (1915) eloquently articulated in The School and Society, "What the best and wisest parent wants for his own child, that must the community want for all of its children. Any other ideal for our schools is narrow and unlovely; acted upon, it destroys our democracy" (p. 3).

When asked if Jackson was the kind of school that teachers and administrators would want their own children to attend, most responded enthusiastically, "Yes!" Those who expressed some doubts did so because they wanted their children to attend a private religious school or because they had some reservations about upper-grade student behavior. But even those with doubts expressed confidence in fellow teachers, the curriculum, and the instructional program. Teachers and administrators articulated that they could trust their own children with their colleagues.

Teachers used the family metaphor to express what went on in their classrooms as well. They believed that it was critical for children to care for each other and learn to get along with each other

because the classroom was both a family/community and preparation for the "real world." Teachers expressed these expectations both to me and to their students, and student behavior indicated that they had internalized these expectations. At every grade level, it was appropriate, expected and accepted that students would help each other, share resources with one another, and view the success of one as contributing to the success of all. Interestingly, because of so many combination (multi-grade) classes, teachers did not expect that all students would be at the same place in their learning. Just as in a family where different age levels preclude children being at the same developmental or skill level, it was taken for granted in classrooms that every child was allowed to develop at her or his own rate. Perhaps these multi-aged classrooms contributed to a sense of family partly because they looked more like a family.

There was also a belief on the part of teachers that the administrators would bend over backwards to help them in any way they could. For example, if there was a classroom crisis, teachers knew they could yell down the hall and one of the administrators would come running. If they had personal problems or family emergencies, there was no sense from administrators that it was "your tough luck." They knew they would get support from the office, and not infrequently the assistant principal stepped in to cover a class if a teacher needed to leave 30 minutes early. Teachers recognized that these ways of relating were not things that were defined in the contract, but were just part of how things were done at Jackson--caring for each other was the norm, just as it is in a healthy family.

Teachers' Relationships

In the previous section I described the ways in which teachers articulated their trust in and care for one another and for their students. In addition, I observed how these values were put into practice at Jackson. On a professional level, teachers were willing, even eager, to share educational

ideas with each other. I observed numerous informal conversations where teachers exchanged ideas regarding classroom practice. In particular, teachers sought out other teachers who had more expertise in a specific area and asked for their help. For example, a ten-year veteran of the school approached a fairly new teacher to ask for help regarding some artists and art prints, because the newer teacher was considered an expert in art by other teachers at the school. In another case, one veteran teacher gave another veteran teacher tips on using learning centers with primary-age children, since the second teacher had recently shifted from middle to primary grades. One new kindergarten teacher developed a unit (in English and Spanish) using materials belonging to two other kindergarten teachers, which all six kindergarten teachers eventually implemented. There was a very strong "norm of collegiality" (Little, 1982, p. 325) at Jackson. One veteran teacher put it this way:

> I think we have good relationships. I think there is a sense of camaraderie, a sense of "let's help each other out." I've heard from other teachers at other schools that sometimes there seems to be jealousy involved, in terms of stealing ideas or stealing bulletin board ideas, and I've never gotten that at [Jackson]. If there's something that I need or want to borrow, it's always open arms to borrow those things. And so, that's really helpful that we share a lot, we share a lot of our materials.

However, helping, caring, and interaction extended beyond the professional level among the teachers. It was not uncommon for teachers to assist each other when personal emergencies arose or to interact outside of the school context. When a teacher needed to leave school early because her baby was sick and needed to go to the doctor, other teachers uncomplainingly stepped in to help cover her class. Perhaps this was because so many of them also had young children and knew they might one day need the favor returned. When a teacher's son or daughter had a birthday party on a Saturday, several faculty told me it was not uncommon for a dozen Jackson teachers to show up at the

party with their own children. Wedding and vacation photos were passed around the lunchroom. When one teacher's husband was hospitalized with cancer, other teachers brought meals to the house so the teacher could spend more time at the hospital.

Teacher-Administrator Relationships

Roscoe administrators consciously modeled attitudes of respect and trust toward all stakeholders, particularly faculty. Through shared decision making and delegation of authority and responsibilities, teachers received the message that their opinions and expertise were valued. Yet while the school sought to hire teachers who supported curricular reform, bilingual education, and a deep commitment to children, it was also committed to hiring teachers who "won't be bullied into a particular teaching style" and who "are very independently minded and free thinking." Consequently, there was often a wide range of opinion on how to accomplish goals or what priority to place on budget items. Nevertheless, there was a climate of tolerance toward differing opinions at the school. In decision-making situations, minority viewpoints were encouraged.

The LEARN (governance) Council, made up of teachers, parents and classified staff, met monthly after school in the library. Administrators attended meetings but voluntarily chose not to vote on the council. The principal recognized the symbolic nature of being a non-voting member--it helped to establish with the other stakeholders that the administrators were "not trying to control things." Teachers expressed the view that they felt trusted by the administration to do what they thought was best for their students. One teacher articulated his feelings this way:

> I would describe [Jackson] as a place where I feel treated like a professional. I've gone to Mrs. [Paul, the principal] countless times and said, "I'd like to do this. Can I do this?," and she says, "Why are you asking me? Do it." Whereas before, it was like, boy, if you didn't clear something with the big honcho, forget it. And I feel treated like a professional. I feel

respected by my colleagues. And I feel like the decisions that I make are--they matter, and they're trusted. When I wanted to go against the Master Plan of the district--ooh, boy I'm putting this on tape--the Master Plan says I'm supposed to still be teaching Spanish reading to my fifth and sixth graders. I went to [Helen, the coordinator] and [Leah, the principal] and I said, "I know what the Master Plan says, but these kids are going to middle school next year. I am not going to teach them Spanish reading!" And they said, "Well, of course not. You have every right to make that decision. You're the teacher." Now our last coordinator would have hung me by the yardarms for not following the Master Plan. But [Helen] and [Leah] both said, "Go for it, you're absolutely right! We trust your judgment." And I'm like, "Wow, what a concept!"

This trust on the part of the administration was further reflected in the way professional development was handled. Training and implementation were typically voluntary. For example, the principal's passion was curriculum, and she looked for ways to introduce faculty to the programs in which she believed. Paul took along a highly-respected primary teacher, Mary Graves, to hear a speaker on Reading Recovery.[3] Graves began to share what she had learned with other Jackson teachers and, after she attended a literacy conference, asked Paul if she could pilot a reading curriculum which utilized many Reading Recovery principles. As Graves shared her enthusiasm and knowledge with other teachers, they too began to request training and materials in similar fashion. Also during the first year of LEARN, the faculty was introduced to the Scottish Storyline[4]

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[3]Reading Recovery is a highly-structured remedial reading program, based on the research and writings of Marie Clay, which targets first grade students who are reading below grade level, through an intensive tutoring program taught by trained teachers.

[4]Scottish Storyline is an integrated, thematic model of instruction built on constructivist principles. "It relies heavily on children's previous experiences, provides children with real life problem solving, and makes education meaningful to children" (LEARN, 1994, p. 3). Teachers receive five days of training for the initial implementation level.

instructional model. The first group of 23 Jackson teachers and administrators voluntarily attended the Scottish Storyline training shortly thereafter and began almost immediately to implement its principles in their classrooms. Other teachers soon began to ask for the training as well, and 100 percent of the Jackson faculty have now received training in this integrated, thematic, constructivist curricular model, including one teacher who was a year away from retirement. All teachers evidenced implementation of new curricular models, including Storyline, in their classrooms.

There was a willingness on the part of teachers to try new things partly because they saw the administration so willing to fully participate along with them, but also because the administrators were incredibly effective at finding the necessary resources to turn the teachers' ideas and dreams into reality. Although the school had a significant amount of categorical funds because of its large number of Limited-English-Proficient and Title 1 students, there was still a need for extra funds whenever a new project surfaced. The coordinator and principal spent considerable time writing grants in order to provide the teachers with training, release time [substitutes] to visit other classrooms, schools or seminars, to equip the school with current technology, textbooks, classroom manipulatives, and to upgrade facilities to enhance the overall school climate. When teachers requested materials, they were often shocked at how quickly purchases were made. Paul articulated that the quickness in ordering was very deliberate. If a teacher came to her with a request, that teacher needed it now, not in four months.

Because the teachers knew that Paul supported and believed in them, and was knowledgeable about teaching and learning, they were willing to accept and support her efforts to continually strive for improvement in educating their students. Paul fostered the belief that the changes taking place at Jackson were completely due to the restructuring implementation, but research reveals that not all LEARN schools have made these kinds of transformations (McKinsey & Co., 1994). Still, Paul

seemed able to let the credit go completely to LEARN and to the teachers, rather than feeling a need to take credit herself.

Classroom Relationships

Most classrooms I visited had an atmosphere of warmth, enthusiasm, and creativity. Although class sizes were large (many above 30 students), teachers knew personal information about students, welcomed them back when they had been absent, used physical touch, gestures, and facial expressions to communicate warmth and affection for students, and did many extras outside of their normal responsibilities to make school a positive experience for their students. For example, one teacher invited interested students into her room before school and gave them piano lessons. Another teacher tutored several students in reading after school on a regular basis. An upper-grade teacher often stayed in her classroom at lunch so she could help her students learn dance routines.

In classrooms students typically were grouped in pairs or small groups, and it was so common to see students helping each other that the exception was a student working on a task by herself or himself. This was true at every grade level, and it was apparent that teachers not only valued but intentionally cultivated such behavior. One primary teacher commented,

> I mix the children all up as far as their seating, so that I've got an even number of first and second graders at each table. I try to make sure they're really mixed as far as English language ability, as far as grade level, as far as overall academic achievement, so that they're all helping each other out. Because, for example, I might have one child who's really excelling in math. He's about average in reading, and he's really struggling with his English 'cause he's really shy about speaking. And another child might be able to benefit from his math, and he might be able to benefit from--and I'm thinking of a particular child with this, that you look at him--his development is all lopsided. And they can all help each other in that case. He can help

somebody in math, and they may be able to speak English up a storm, and so it has some real pluses.

I observed relatively few interpersonal conflicts between students. These were generally resolved either by the students themselves, by other students acting as mediators, or by the teacher intervening and talking to the students privately. I almost never saw students publicly embarrassed by teachers or by other students. Classrooms at Jackson were safe places for the children.

School-Parent Relationships

Jackson School exhibited a welcoming attitude toward parents. Parents articulated feeling welcome and heard when they raised concerns. This was fostered partly by the principal's Open Door policy. Her office was right next to the main entrance, and her door was never closed in the entire time I observed at the school. Parents, teachers, students, classified staff, and outside visitors all had access to the principal and assistant principal, and as I walked by the principal's office several times a day, I often noted the range of people who were talking with her. In addition, parents were encouraged to participate in schoolwide and regional governance, and those interviewed said their opinions were solicited and taken seriously. In addition to formal programs in which parents could be involved, parents could (and did) volunteer in classrooms and were encouraged to visit regularly. Programs were held both during the day and at night to accommodate different schedules. The school office had recently been remodeled to make it more accessible to parents, and the school was in the process of establishing a Parent Welcoming Committee. The school receptionist was bilingual, so that parents could generally be addressed in their native language.

The community representative, counselor, and administrators at Jackson spent considerable time interacting with parents. They provided counseling for parents having problems at home, helped obtain social services for parents in need of medical care, housing, and employment, attended the

weekly Parent Education Meetings and addressed parent questions as they arose, made a point of involving parents in special programs at the school, and did all they could to provide parents with training, classes, and information in response to requests from parents themselves. For example, the coordinator started after-school computer classes for parents (in English and Spanish) because so many of them wanted to learn what their children were learning on the computer. The community representative took the parents on field trips to the local library and arranged for them to have CPR and First Aid classes taught by the Red Cross. The counselor arranged for an outside group to provide parenting classes at night for those who could not attend the daytime Parent Education Meetings. The school staff was quick to respond to expressed needs of parents, both individual and corporate.

Stakeholders' Responsibility for the School and Each Other

At Jackson there was a strong sense of ownership, responsibility and pride in the school that members of all stakeholder groups exhibited. Principal Paul encouraged teachers to explore curricula and make decisions about where they wanted to head as a school, gently nudging and introducing them to programs and ideas she preferred, but leaving the final decision up to them. Increasingly, teachers took responsibility for their own professional development (e.g., structuring their Staff Development Days), school beautification (e.g., contacting local artists regarding schoolwide murals), and initiating their own solutions to problems, rather than simply expecting the administration to solve them (e.g., scheduling a meeting with a literacy expert for help in working with Grades 2-5).

Caring for "our" school was a repetitive theme at all levels. Students were encouraged in the morning assemblies to report graffiti taggers and keep the school picked up because it was "our" school. They were taught to care for the classroom and to see it as theirs to clean. Teachers requested all-purpose cleaner and brooms that they could keep in their classrooms so students could be involved

in that process, rather than just expecting the custodial staff to do it. Classified staff, who were in some ways the least connected group to the school, also evidenced a sense of responsibility for the school. Paul shared how the plant manager routinely drove by the school on weekends to be sure everything was okay. He was instrumental in getting the school cleaned up after the 1994 Northridge earthquake in time for students to attend classes. Several classroom aides had been at the school more than a decade and said they felt like grandparents to the students (and like mothers to some of the teachers).

Parents who wanted to initiate adult classes, student uniforms, and school fund-raisers were encouraged to pursue their ideas and given support along the way from school staff. In the spring of 1996, the parents planned and executed an elaborate Saturday fair to raise money for the school with minimal assistance from school staff. The coordinator articulated how much the parents' sense of ownership had changed in the years she had been at Jackson: "The biggest change I see is that the parent group that you've seen bears no resemblance to the parents we started with four years ago, who would not open their mouths." Under LEARN, parents began to communicate what they wanted and work to make those things happen. Though they had been supportive of the school before, they now participated in making Jackson the kind of place they wanted it to be.

There was also a strong perception at the school that everyone had a responsibility to care for all the children, not just those in their classroom. Teachers frequently substituted at Jackson when they were off-track, and consequently many of the teachers knew a large percentage of the children, not an easy feat with almost 1200 students. Teachers also provided time-out space for students from neighboring classes who needed to be out of their classroom for disciplinary purposes. If adults saw students misbehaving in the halls, they took action, even if the students were not theirs. The principal expressed her perception of this dynamic:

> I just think if you create a culture that all children belong to everybody, you can't neglect a child, you can't say, "That's your kid, I'm turning my back on him." Nobody turns their back on a child, and that's what schools are for. That's what should be the culture of a school, and I think we're pretty well there. And conversely, teachers can't get upset--If I found your child doing something wrong and took action, you can't say, "You can't take action. That's my kid." They're all our children. They're all our children.

The Interconnectedness of Respect, Caring and Trust

Respect and the Responsibility to Become Proficient

Respect is defined as an act of giving particular attention or consideration to someone or something; high or special regard or esteem; and the quality or state of being esteemed, which is to be highly valued and prized accordingly. People may be esteemed because of their inherent or intrinsic worth as human beings, which in a community-like school is how adults tend to relate to students. Or people may be esteemed because they are proficient in a particular area that is valued by others. Educators have consistently highlighted the importance of respect in schools.

For example, in a two-year Study of Decision Making in High Schools, which included interviews with 180 school personnel in 45 public high schools in 15 states, researchers found that shared values, a schoolwide mission, taking stock of where the school is at, and *building mutual respect and trust* were necessary parts of making shared decision making successful (Weiss, Cambone & Wyeth, 1992). A similar study conducted by Firestone and Rosenblum (1988) of 10 high schools in 5 cities identified five school factors, including *respect*, that increased the commitment of teachers and students to each other and to the school. Not surprisingly, students liked teachers who respected them. And in a study of 78 New Jersey secondary schools, Hoy and Feldman (1987) identified student *respect for others* as one characteristic of a healthy school. Finally, Lee, Dedrick

and Smith's (1991) analysis of the High School & Beyond data led them to the conclusion that:

> The strongest predictor of teacher efficacy is community....Schools in which teachers feel more efficacious are likely to be environments in which human relationships are supportive..., where teachers "share beliefs and values about. . .the central mission of the school," and where they "feel accepted and *respected*." (p. 204)

Theodore Sizer (1990), in his Foreword to Improving Schools from Within, further articulated the importance of respect in schools:

> Collegiality....depends on respect of teachers and principals for themselves and for each other. People work hard in a place where colleagues listen well and take one another seriously (while not always agreeing) and where there is an expectation--even a demand--that everyone on the faculty can and must make a difference in the overall life of the school (p. xi).

Jackson School evidenced relationships characterized by respect, and this was verbalized by school personnel as well.

Teachers' words: *"I feel treated like a professional [by the administration]. I feel respected by my colleagues."*

"I feel a respect here. I feel like what I do and what I have to say is listened to and respected, which I think is very important for everybody to feel that confirmation."

Classified staff's words: *"They [the administration] respect my opinions. They believe in me and that's why I'm here."*

"I think there's respect, a mutual respect. We respect the teachers 'cause they know [how to teach], and the teachers respect us 'cause they understand that we're trying to do a job, trying to learn how it is to do a job correctly. I think it works out pretty good."

The respect which characterized professional relationships at Jackson was tied to an implicit

responsibility to become proficient. While faculty and administrators recognized that their colleagues were in process or had different beliefs about what was best for students, the fact that each staff member was committed to growing and developing expertise enabled staff to respect each other, in spite of their differences and an awareness of struggles. In contrast, the respect given to parents and students appeared to be based more centrally on the intrinsic worth of each person, as reflected in the school's mission statement: "Roscoe's vision is for a community connected school where all children are valued and learn to become educated thinkers and caring members of society."

Caring and Commitment

Caring is defined as feeling interest or concern for something or someone. It is also a regard for a person which stems from esteem. Thus, the connection between respect and caring is established. Caring is a natural result of respect, and respect is a natural precursor to caring. We can care for people whom we do not respect (particularly with family members), but in a school setting, it is much less likely that we will. Nel Noddings (1992) identified the relationship between caring and respect when she wrote, "We need to be cared for in the sense that we need to be understood, received, *respected*, recognized" (p. xi).

Caring has been a central theme in several school-based studies, including a case study of a high-functioning inner-city elementary school, where the staff verbalized and exemplified their care for one another (Crawford & Aagaard, 1991). Both teacher-to-teacher caring and teacher-to-student caring, as manifested in decency and fairness, were key factors related to teacher and student commitment in Firestone and Rosenblum's (1988) study of ten high schools. And Louis and Miles (1990), in their study of five improving high schools, concluded that caring was a strong component of sustaining positive change:

The increasingly strong collaboration, the empowerment of administrators and staff, and the

> reaffirmation of a clear, compelling culture that emphasized *'demanding caring'* kept the improvement effort going--even when resources were threatened and new people entered the improvement effort. (p. 78)

In a collaborative research project with a sixth-grade teacher, Mercado (1993) found that as students perceived that the teacher and the researcher cared about them as individuals, they were much more willing to put effort into their work, even going beyond the expectations others had for them. In so doing, the students' capacity to care grew and deepened. And in a study of an inner-city elementary school in Philadelphia, the authors concluded that:

> Caring requires action, going well beyond empathy--or the ability to see the world through the eyes of others--to accepting the responsibility to act (or refrain from action) based on what one sees. Caring is a value, but more than that, it is a moral imperative....The children appeared to view their teachers as adults, rather than instructors, and valued caring and interpersonal relationships with them. (Webb, Wilson, Corbett & Mordecai, 1993, p. 33, 42)

Similarly, Noddings (1992) argued that "caring is a way of being in relation, not a set of specific behaviors" (p. 17). As noted above, Jackson School evidenced caring relationships and its personnel verbalized this commitment to each other and the students as well.

Teachers' words: *"They [other teachers and administrators] were very, very concerned on a personal level. Very caring. There are some very caring, very concerned people that are really pulling together. Not just on a professional level as far as making their classes what they should be, but helping each other, and that was really neat to me."*

"A lot of the teachers here, they do care about the kids. I think this is a good school for kids to go to, and I think that the kids that do go here, their parents are very fortunate to have a caring staff like those here."

Administrators' words: *"There's a lot of caring. They [the teachers] are really close--and at the faculty meetings you can see. To me, one destructive teacher or a non-caring teacher really is a downer. Bottom line--you have to care about the kids."*

"I think [the teachers] really care about each other. This is a young and caring faculty that goes above and beyond the call of duty. They are interested in curriculum, interested in professional growth, and very, very caring about the kids and their families."

Caring relationships are built over time, and thus a commitment to the school and to each other is part of what enables people to care for one another. As Jackson students, parents, and staff developed and exhibited a sense of ownership toward the school and a responsibility toward each other, their commitment did not cause people to care, but in some sense made it easier for them to care for one another. They knew they were on the same team and were working together to accomplish the same goal, rather than competing against one another. Caring and commitment were mutually reinforcing, and caring was often grounded in the respect they had for one another.

Trust and Trustworthiness

Trust is defined in the dictionary as assured reliance on the character, ability, strength, or truth of someone or something; and to place one's confidence in someone or something. As others have noted, it is foundational to much of what happens in schools.

For example, Talbert and McLaughlin (1993) provide a literature review surrounding contexts of "teaching for understanding." One of the three principles they articulated was the need for a classroom to be a community of learners, where shared goals and standards, *mutual trust*, and behavioral norms support learning. Similarly, in restructuring schools, it was found that changing the formal structure was not enough; a change in school culture was essential, requiring time, training, assistance and the opportunity to develop *mutual respect and trust*. One school had fostered a

climate of trust and support through participating in regular activities together (Weiss et al., 1992). In a case study of an effective inner-city elementary school, a strong support system existed for teachers, with trust and camaraderie established over many years (Crawford & Aagaard, 1991). Hoy and Feldman (1987) identified teacher trust for one another as one characteristic of a healthy school. In accelerated schools as well, trust has been a key part of positive change (Hopfenberg, Levin, Meister & Rogers, 1990). Sizer (1990) is emphatic about the key role trust plays in schools.

> Collegiality arises from the trust within a group; and trust is requisite when an institution of consequence--a school--depends on the honest expression of trust....Build a school on honest relationships, and the inept, confused, or slothful teacher will be exposed, unable to hide in her or his classroom. Create a climate of trust, and insecure teachers will develop confidence with the help of their colleagues. (Sizer, 1990, p. xi, xii)

Jackson relationships were characterized by both trust and trustworthiness. In other words, if a person trusts me and I repeatedly fail to follow through, they will learn not to trust me. Trust goes hand in hand with trustworthiness or dependability. Jackson's principal trusted the teachers by giving them freedom over curriculum and instruction. In turn, they continually sought to improve in these areas. She trusted the parents by letting them host a school fund-raiser and by turning over an unused shack for them to renovate as a parent center. In turn, they worked hard to complete both projects. Teachers trusted each other with their own children, and colleagues rose to the challenge. Trust was evident at Jackson and stakeholders verbalized this trust in each other.

> Parents' words: *"I trust her [my child's teacher] opinion. I trust her judgment."*
>
> Teachers' words: *"I feel like the decisions that I make are trusted [by the administration]."*
>
> *"I would trust the faculty [to teach my own children]."*
>
> *I've seen [the principal] back us on some pretty shaky deals. There have been some things*

that we've asked of her, that she's like, "Well,..." but she's come through. I mean, she has been a trooper. She's come through. Even though maybe personally I don't think she was sure if it would work, she said, "You know what. I think you guys are professionals, and you know the school a little better than I do. I know the district, but you know the school, so you go with it, and I'll back you. I'll keep the district off of you. We are a LEARN school, and I'll support you, and if it works, hey, let's do it."

Administrators' words: *"There's a lot of trust. It's not like everything needs to be hashed out all the time. We don't have to mark our territory at every meeting. There are a lot of assumptions about why we're here and what we're about that make us able to reach agreement fairly easily."*

Conclusion

While Jackson Elementary School exhibited many positive characteristics, in particular, respect, caring, and trust were central to many of the interactions which took place and many of the comments stakeholders verbalized when asked how they would describe the school and the relationships at the school. Restructuring was not sufficient. Because teachers and administrators cared for, trusted and respected each other, they could work together to accomplish their goals of helping students become educated thinkers and caring members of society. In the same way, school personnel interacted with parents and students in ways which manifested caring, trust and respect, resulting in home-school collaborations. As one father articulated, "They helped me to get ideas of what to do, and now [my daughter] knows how to read, thanks to them. I wouldn't know, I didn't know how to help but they showed me the way." Jackson School stakeholders would agree with Louis, Marks and Kruse (Louis et al., 1996) that to improve schools we must look at ways to change school culture and patterns of relating, not just rely on changing structures. Jackson, in a sense, has "showed us the way."

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